



THE CORRELATIONS AMONG LEARNING MOTIVATION, READING COMPREHENSION AND TRANSLATION ABILITY OF EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Accepted :

11 May 2026

Published :

11 May 2026

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between students' learning motivation and translation ability, the association between reading comprehension and translation performance, and the combined contribution of both variables to the translation skills of EFL university students. A quantitative correlational design was applied, involving 54 participants selected through purposive sampling. The research instruments included a motivation questionnaire, a TOEFL-based reading comprehension test, and a translation assessment, with data analysis conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. The findings indicate significant positive correlations among all variables. Both learning motivation and reading comprehension were found to jointly explain 74.4% of the variance in translation ability, with reading comprehension emerging as the strongest predictor. These results suggest that students' translation competence is strongly influenced by both affective and cognitive dimensions of language learning. The study offers practical implications for English language educators in developing instructional approaches that integrate reading literacy and translation practice. Its originality lies in demonstrating that the interaction between motivational factors and cognitive reading skills forms a crucial foundation for enhancing academic translation performance, thereby contributing to the advancement of a more integrated, competency-based language curriculum.

Keywords: *Learning Motivation, Reading Comprehension, Translation Ability, EFL Students, Correlational Design.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental instrument that enables humans to express ideas, emotions, and build complex social relationships in various life contexts (Harmer, 2015). In today's era of globalization, English proficiency for *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) students is not merely an additional intellectual achievement, but an absolute prerequisite for broader access to global literature, cutting-edge technology, and science (Grabe & Zhang, 2022). English has become the primary language of instruction in academia, where the ability to understand and produce texts in this language

is a benchmark for a student's success internationally. Among the various language skills taught in universities, translation skills emerge as one of the most challenging and crucial competencies. This is because translation is not simply a mechanical process of replacing words, but rather requires a sharp analysis of the structure of the source language before reconstructing it into the target language while maintaining the authenticity of its meaning, nuances, and communicative purpose (Baker, 2021).

However, the reality of higher education demonstrates a significant gap between curriculum demands and students'

actual abilities. Many undergraduates still face significant challenges in producing accurate, natural, and acceptable translations. This obstacle often stems from low levels of reading comprehension, where students frequently focus on literal meaning and fail to grasp the nuances of meaning or implicit messages contained within the text (McNamara & Magliano, 2021). Without adequate extensive reading skills, the language transfer process tends to be stilted and often results in fatal errors in information delivery. The inability to discern the cohesion and coherence of a paragraph ultimately results in a fragmented translation that is difficult for the target reader to understand.

In addition to the cognitive aspects related to literacy, there is a psychological dimension that is often overlooked but plays a vital role: learning motivation. Motivation acts as an internal fuel that determines the extent to which a student is willing to allocate time and energy to solving language difficulties (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Students with strong intrinsic motivation tend to demonstrate greater persistence, greater curiosity, and mental resilience when faced with complex academic texts and unfamiliar grammatical structures (Al-Hoorie, 2017). Conversely, low motivation often causes students to quickly become discouraged when encountering obstacles in translating technical terms.

Therefore, the issue of translation ability cannot be viewed from a single perspective. A comprehensive analysis is needed that connects cognitive readiness through text comprehension and affective readiness through motivational drive. By understanding how these two factors are intertwined, educators can map out more effective strategies to help students achieve maximum language competence. Based on this background, this study aims to dissect in more depth the dynamics of the relationship between motivational drive and students' reading proficiency, and the extent to which both collectively shape students' translation ability profiles in the context of higher education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Translation skills are a high-level cognitive competency that involves more than simply transferring linguistic codes from one language to another. They are multidimensional skills that integrate grammatical competence, sociolinguistic understanding, and complex cultural transfer strategies (House, 2021). In practice, translation requires students to be able to deconstruct a text at the syntactic and semantic levels before reconstructing it as a whole. In Nababan's (2003) view, a quality translation process must meet three main criteria: accuracy of the message, *acceptability* of the text in the target culture, and good *readability*.

A student is not only required to master vocabulary, but must also be sensitive to word equivalents that are appropriate to the context of the text genre, such as in report texts, which often contain certain technical terms. Therefore, a student translator is required to have sensitivity to the nuances of meaning to avoid fatal conceptual shifts when reconstructing messages from the source language to the target language (Pym, 2020). Furthermore, success in producing professional translated texts also depends heavily on the student's reflective ability to conduct self-evaluation and an iterative revision process to minimize stylistic errors that can obscure the original message (Mossop, 2020).

Reading Comprehension as a Cognitive and Analytical Foundation

On the other hand, reading comprehension is seen as a dynamic, interactive mental process, in which readers actively construct meaning through the integration of explicit information in the text with prior background knowledge (Kintsch, 2018). In the context of translation assignments, reading is not merely a passive receptive

Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM

activity, but rather a critical analytical stage that determines the quality of language input before further processing. Students who possess strong literacy strategies are able to use inference techniques to understand complex text structures, recognize cohesion between paragraphs, and grasp the author's intentions that are not directly expressed (Afflerbach et al., 2020).

This ability also involves technical aspects such as mastery of grammar and systematic recognition of text structures. Limited working memory and failure to perform in-depth text processing will directly impact discourse interpretation errors, which in turn will damage the translation results (Bowers & Hume, 2021). Therefore, mastery of reading skills is an absolute prerequisite for language production skills; without a thorough and in-depth understanding of the source language text, the process of transferring messages to the target language will lose their original context and produce ambiguous texts (Grabe & Stoller, 2019).

The Dynamics of Learning Motivation in Second Language Acquisition

In addition to cognitive factors, the affective dimension, namely learning motivation, plays a key role in the academic success of EFL students. Motivation is not a static, fixed entity, but rather a dynamic psychological drive that triggers an individual to initiate, direct, and sustain learning efforts over a very long period of time (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). This motivation encompasses students' desire to participate in the global community, appreciate foreign literature, and even meet future professional needs.

Students with a clear goal orientation whether intrinsically motivated by a love of language or extrinsically motivated by

career goals tend to be more persistent in facing challenging linguistic challenges, particularly when faced with the task of translating scientific texts that require high accuracy (Al-Hoorie, 2017). Classroom environment factors, teaching style, and autonomy support provided by instructors also shape students' motivational profiles, which in turn influence their level of engagement in challenging literacy activities (Jang et al., 2018). The synergy between motivation-driven mental toughness and cognitive skills in analyzing texts is a crucial combination that determines the effectiveness of students' overall language performance, as strong motivation will encourage students to continue practicing despite technical difficulties (Alves et al., 2021; Oga-Baldwin & Fryer, 2020).

The Relationship Between Variables in an Integrated Theoretical Perspective

The relationship between motivation, reading, and translation forms an interdependent learning ecosystem. Motivation provides energy and persistence for students to continue reading and expand their vocabulary horizons, while good reading skills provide the raw material or quality input that is essential for the translation process (Grabe & Zhang, 2022). Theoretically, failure in any of these aspects for example, low motivation or weak reading skills will create a domino effect that hinders the achievement of ideal translation competence. Therefore, the integration of psychological motivation and literacy skills is a key focus in understanding how EFL students manage and complete complex language tasks at the university level effectively (Cao & Hu, 2022; Kiraly, 2021).

3. METHODS

This research fundamentally applies quantitative research methods with a correlational design to statistically investigate the dynamics of relationships between variables. This design was chosen based on the primary objective of the study, which was to map the extent to which variations in the independent variables namely, learning motivation and reading comprehension are related to variations in the dependent variable, namely, students' translation skills. This approach allows researchers to measure the degree of association between variables without intervening or manipulating the research subjects, allowing the phenomena studied to be described in accordance with natural conditions in the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population and Sampling Technique

The population in this study includes all active students enrolled in English language education study programs at the university level. Given the complexity of the variables studied, the researcher applied a *purposive sampling* technique to determine the research sample so that the data obtained is truly representative of the competencies being tested (Arikunto, 2010). The selected sample consisted of 54 students who had passed prerequisite courses such as *Reading* and *Translation*. This criterion was established to ensure that respondents had sufficient background knowledge to complete the test instrument given, thus maintaining the internal validity of the study.

Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

The primary data collection process was carried out systematically through three different types of instruments in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the profile of each variable.

Learning Motivation Questionnaire

This instrument consists of statement items that measure students' motivational orientation, ranging from interest in foreign literature to the desire to participate in a global professional community (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2022).

Reading Comprehension Test

For cognitive variables, researchers used an objective test that adopted the standard Longman TOEFL format. This test is designed to measure students' ability to identify main ideas, understand vocabulary in context, and make inferences from complex academic texts (Brown & Lee, 2015).

Translation Ability Test

The final instrument is a performance test in which respondents are asked to translate a report text *from* the source language to the target language. The students' work is then assessed by expert assessors using a comprehensive assessment rubric, covering aspects of accuracy in conveying the message, acceptability of the structure in the target language, and the overall readability of the text (Nababan, 2003).

Data Analysis Techniques and Statistical Tests

All collected raw data were then coded and processed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 software to minimize manual calculation errors (Field, 2017). Before testing the main hypothesis, the researcher conducted a series of prerequisite analysis tests to ensure the validity of the data. The normality test was conducted using the *Kolmogorov-Smirnov* technique to determine whether the data distribution follows a normal curve, while the linearity test was used to

confirm that the relationship between variables can be explained by a straight line.

After all assumptions were met, the researcher proceeded to the *Pearson Product Moment* correlation analysis stage to calculate the partial correlation coefficient (r). As a final stage, multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the coefficient of determination (R^2), which shows how large the percentage of collective contribution of learning motivation and reading comprehension is in explaining students' simultaneous translation ability (Sugiyono, 2013). This strict statistical procedure is carried out to ensure that the conclusions drawn have a high level of academic confidence.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on a series of statistical tests conducted on data from 54 student respondents, an in-depth empirical picture was obtained regarding the profile of the relationship between variables. The initial stage of the analysis focused on prerequisite testing, where the data on learning motivation, reading comprehension, and translation ability were proven to be normally distributed and have a linear relationship, making it suitable to proceed to the parametric analysis stage. In the partial correlation test using the *Pearson Product Moment* technique, it was found that the learning motivation variable had a significant correlation coefficient with translation ability. This indicates that students' psychological drive, both originating from the internal desire to master the language and external academic pressure, has a significant role in determining their translation scores.

Furthermore, the analysis of cognitive variables revealed even more impressive findings. The correlation between reading comprehension and translation ability yielded a very strong

correlation coefficient (r). This figure reflects a high degree of interdependence between students' ability to analyze source language texts and their ability to reconstruct them into the target language. These statistics consistently show that students who score high on the TOEFL reading comprehension test tend to produce more accurate translations and have a better understanding of Indonesian language structures.

As the core of the research findings, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to measure the simultaneous influence of the two independent variables. The statistical calculation results show that learning motivation and reading comprehension collectively contribute 74.4% to the variance in students' translation abilities. The coefficient of determination (R^2) This highly significant) provides strong evidence that the model proposed in this study is able to explain most of the factors that influence students' translation competence. Meanwhile, the remaining percentage of 25.6% is influenced by other variables not covered in this study, such as mastery of technical vocabulary, level of language anxiety, or students' practical experience in the field of professional translation.

An in-depth discussion of these findings leads us to the conclusion that EFL students' translation abilities are not formed in a single instance, but rather result from a complex interaction between affective and cognitive factors. The significant relationship found with the learning motivation variable emphasizes the role of motivation as a driving force or mental energy (Oga-Baldwin & Fryer, 2020). Students who view learning English as a means to appreciate art, literature, or participate in a global professional community tend to have greater resilience when facing linguistic difficulties (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Cao & Hu, 2022). This motivation also drives students to be more careful in

Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM

choosing equivalents to avoid distorting the original meaning of the text (Nababan, 2003).

However, when comparing the magnitude of the influence, reading comprehension clearly holds a more dominant position in determining the success of a translation task. Conceptually, translation is a two-stage process: deconstructing meaning in the source language and reconstructing meaning in the target language. If students fail to infer or understand cohesive relationships between paragraphs during the deconstruction (reading) stage, their reconstruction will be semantically flawed (Afflerbach et al., 2020; Cain & Oakhill, 2018). Cognitive failures in processing text input will create a "domino effect" that undermines the quality of the translated output (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). This reinforces the premise that mature literacy skills are the foundation that precedes higher-level language production skills (Grabe & Zhang, 2022).

The integration of these two variables in a regression analysis provides new perspectives for the development of English language teaching at the university level. The simultaneous contribution of 74.4% suggests that educational interventions cannot focus solely on one aspect. A highly motivated student with weak reading strategies will produce enthusiastic but inaccurate translations. Conversely, a cognitively intelligent student with low motivation may not reach their full potential due to a lack of persistence in the text revision process (Mossop, 2020; Kiraly, 2021). Therefore, higher education curricula need to create learning environments that support student autonomy to maintain motivation (Jang et al., 2018), while also reinforcing critical reading exercises that target in-depth discourse comprehension (Al-Sobh, 2023). Overall, this study confirms that the synergy between mental drive

and cognitive proficiency is key for EFL students to achieve professional and competitive translation standards.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis and discussion presented, this study concludes that there is a positive and significant correlation, both partially and simultaneously, between learning motivation, reading comprehension, and translation ability in EFL students at the tertiary level. The main findings indicate that learning motivation acts as a psychological drive that ensures the continuity of students' learning process, while reading comprehension functions as a cognitive pillar that provides a foundation for accurate discourse interpretation. The collective contribution of both independent variables, reaching 74.4%, confirms that students' translation competence is not only determined by linguistic skills alone, but also the result of a synergy between mental toughness and the depth of literacy strategies. The dominance of the reading comprehension variable in this research model makes it clear that mastery of the source language text is an absolute prerequisite that precedes the successful transfer of messages into the target language.

As a pedagogical implication, English language educational institutions and teachers need to implement more integrated instructional strategies. This can be done by incorporating critical reading exercises that target understanding of text cohesion and coherence before students undertake translation assignments. Furthermore, efforts to maintain student motivation through the use of authentic text materials relevant to their professional interests will significantly improve the quality of academic output. By strengthening these two aspects simultaneously, students are expected to be able to produce translations that meet the high

professional criteria of accuracy, acceptability, and readability.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to express his deepest appreciation and gratitude to all parties who have provided support, guidance, and contributions to the completion of this research. Special thanks are extended to Ety Pratiwi, M.Pd., my supervisor, who provided valuable guidance, constructive suggestions, and in-depth academic guidance throughout the preparation of this research paper. Her dedication and input have greatly assisted the author in sharpening the analysis and argumentation structure of the research.

Thanks are also extended to fellow students of the English Language Education Study Program, Postgraduate Program, Universitas PGRI Palembang, especially the respondents who have been willing to take the time and provide honest data for the purposes of this research. The author also thanks the leadership and staff of Universitas PGRI Palembang for the facilities and academic environment that support the implementation of this study. Finally, the author expresses his deepest gratitude to his beloved family for their continuous prayers and moral support, which have been a source of strength for the author in completing all stages of this academic study.

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Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM

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